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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
121
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THE SPARROW NET
4 OF 4
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
front cover colors by **DAN JACKSON**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryu dojo* destroyed by the Ittō *ryū*.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the shogun and seeking the secret of immortality

DŌA

Dōa, an Ittō *ryū* warrior, is slowly befriending Rin, with neither of them knowing their real connection

ISAKU

Dōa's trusted bodyguard and member of the Itto-*ryu*

BURANDO

Deranged medical examiner, returned to prison by a disappointed Kagimura

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Imprisoned in an underground cell, Manji is an unwilling participant in Habaki Kagimura's "immortality experiments." Burando, Kagimura's lead medical examiner, fails to transfer the powers of the *kessen-chu* to another human and loses his grip on reality. After receiving a clue to Manji's whereabouts, Rin rejoins Dōa and Isaku in the streets of Edo, only to have Dōa pick another battle with the local police. Seeing no other alternative, Isaku throws Dōa and Rin into a river, where the swift current takes them away from the street fight.

designer **SCOTT COOK** editorial assistant **RYAN JORGENSEN**
editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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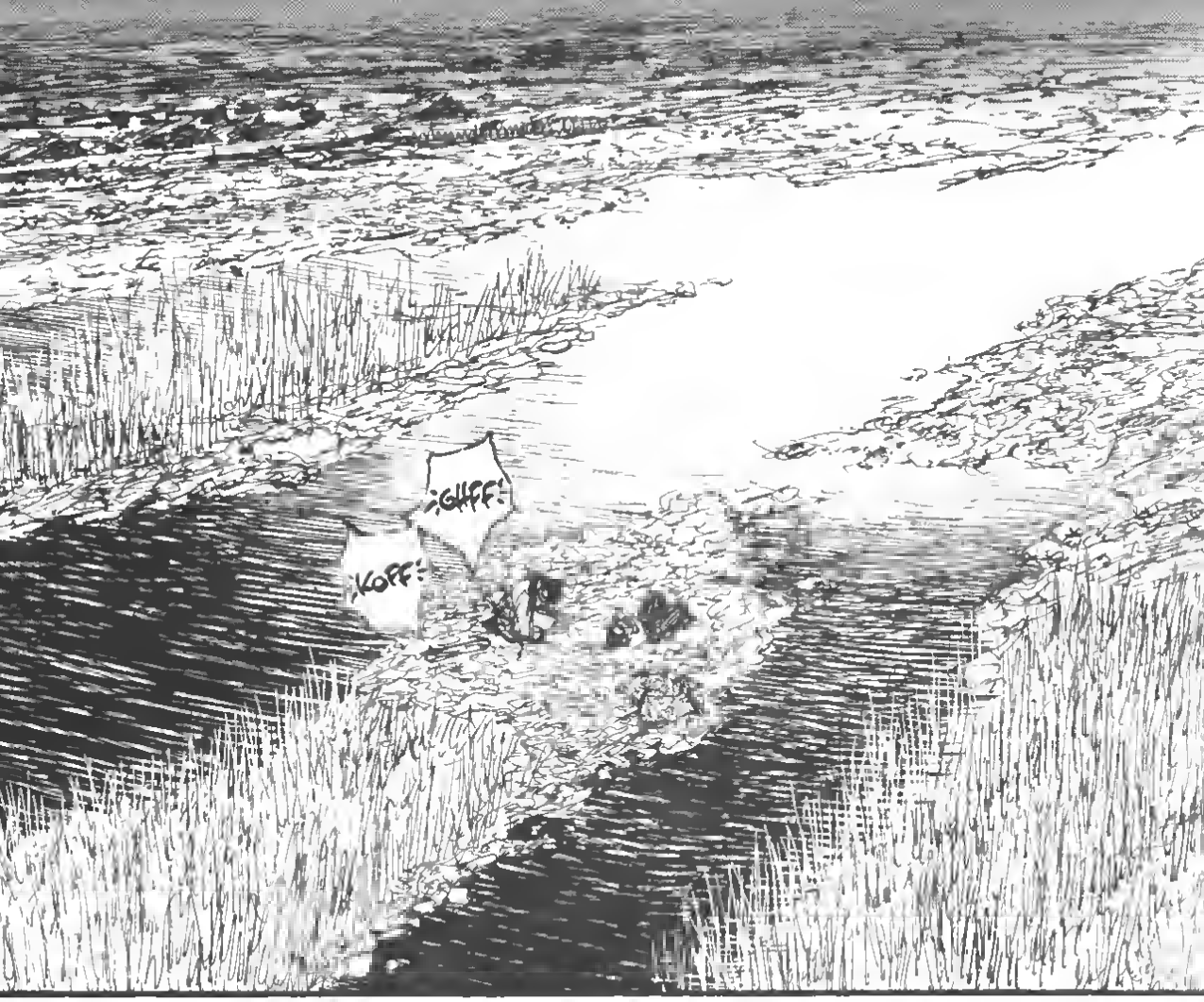
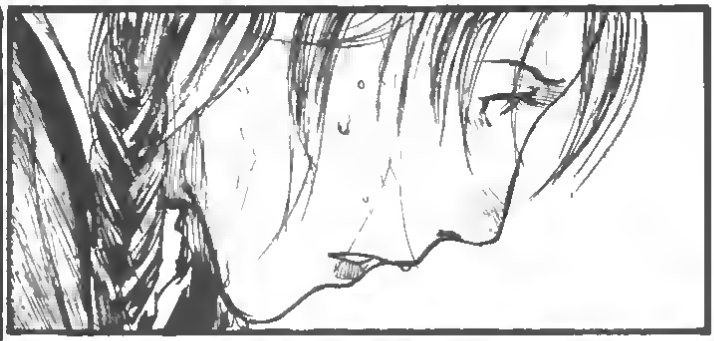
無限の住人

THE SPARROW NET

-part four-

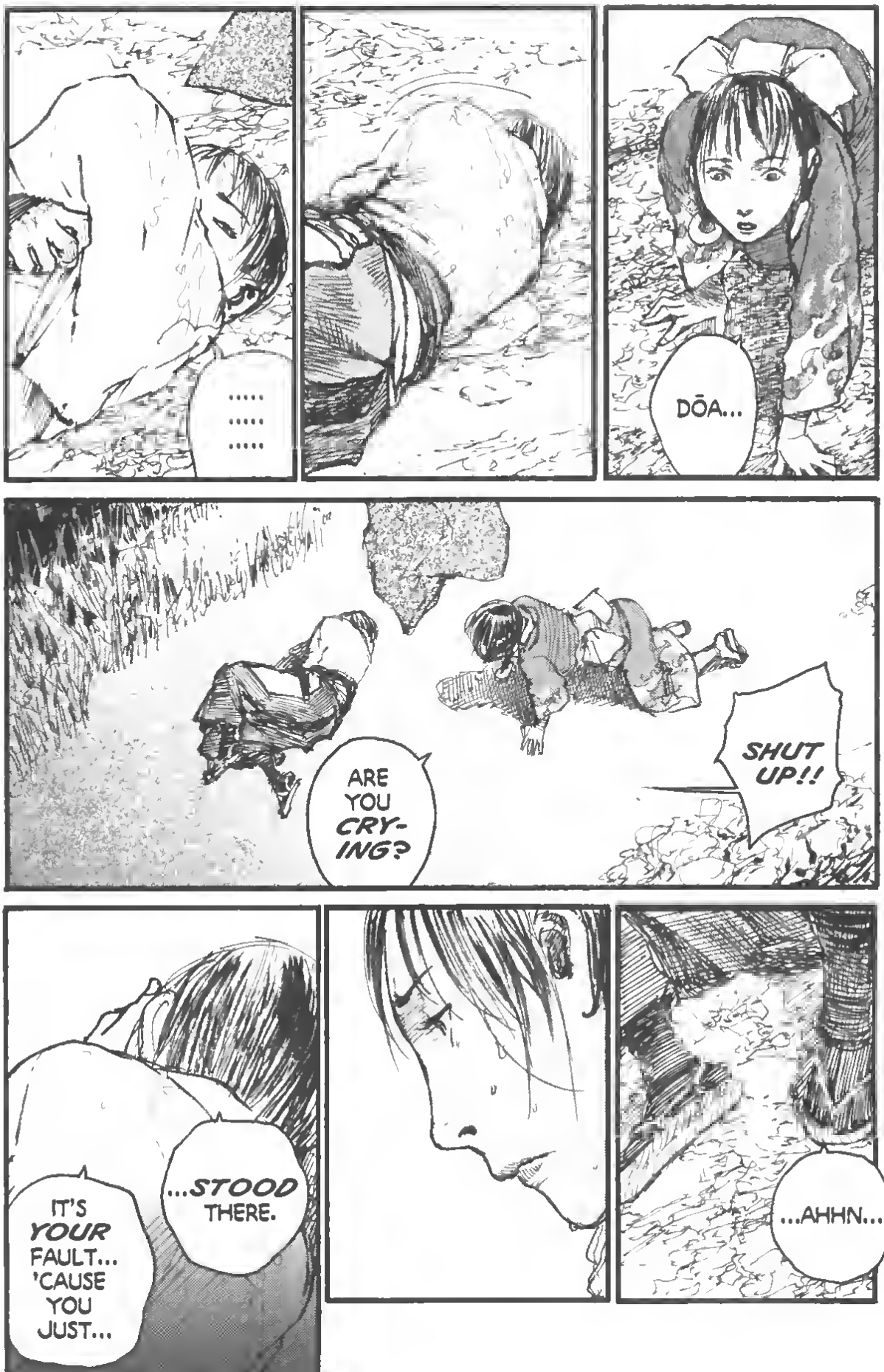

GUFF!
KOFF!

UHNG...

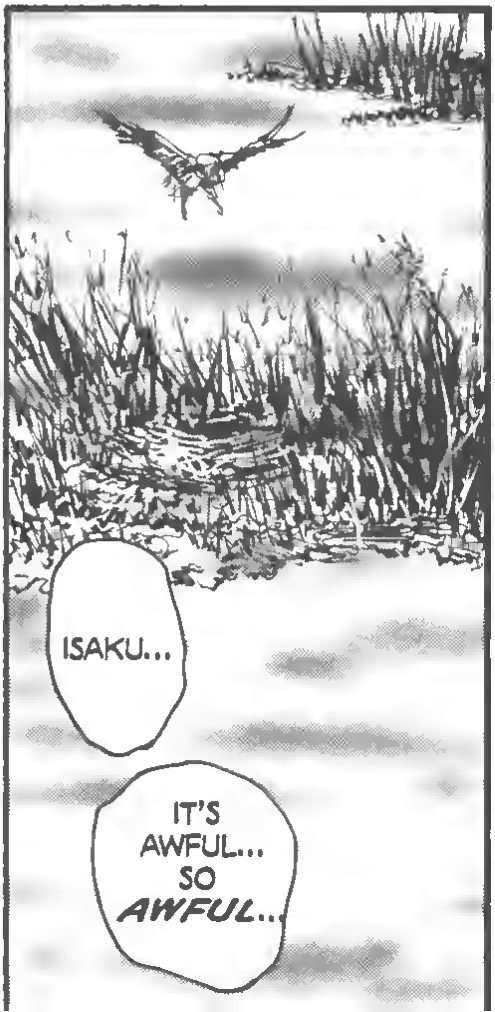


"LOOK AFTER DŌA," HE SAYS...

OR MAYBE... SHE'S NEVER TRIED?
...MEANING THAT THE GIRL CAN'T EVEN SWIM?
BRRR...
...NOT GOOD.
DŌA... COME ON!
IF YOU JUST LIE THERE UNTIL THE SUN SETS, YOU'LL DO WORSE THAN CATCH COLD.
YOU HEAR ME?


.....
.....
.....
DŌA...
ARE YOU CRY-ING?
SHUT UP!!
...AHHN...
...STOOD THERE.
IT'S YOUR FAULT... 'CAUSE YOU JUST...

WHAT TO DO...
OHHH, WHAT TO *DO*...


ISAKU...
IT'S AWFUL... SO *AWFUL*...

NO! WHAT CAN I *DO*...?!
THEY'LL *KILL* HIM...

HOW CAN I--

STOP IT!
NOBODY'S *DYING!*

A HUGE GUY LIKE ISAKU...?
HE PROBABLY BROKE FREE!
AND EVEN IF HE'S CAUGHT...
RIGHT? REMEMBER?! THE GUY WITH THE EYEBROWS?
...THEY WOULDN'T KILL HIM! ALL THOSE COPS? YOU MURDERED THEM, NOT HIM!
HE AS GOOD AS TESTIFIED TO THAT.
.....
.....
.....
DŌA!
I'LL HELP OUT ANY WAY I CAN!
LET'S GO HOME. WE'LL FIND A WAY TO SAVE HIM.

I'VE NEVER SEEN A MAN LIKE THAT...
ALL THAT STRENGTH. EVEN WHEN SURROUNDED...
...HE JUST SHIELDED US. HELPED US ESCAPE.
NOT MY FIGHT. I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS. BUT...
...JUST ABANDONING A MAN LIKE THAT...
...ISN'T RIGHT...
ISAKU... ISAKU...
DŌA!
SNAP OUT OF IT!
I NEED YOUR SKILLS. NOW!

I ABSOLUTELY WILL NOT ABANDON YOU!
AND THE AUTHORITIES CAN'T EXECUTE HIM, NOT FOR TOSSING PEOPLE AROUND...
YOU DON'T GET IT...
YOU, YOU... DON'T GET ANYTHING!
THEY'LL DO TERRIBLE THINGS...
WORSE THAN IF THEY CAUGHT ME...
ISAKU'S A KIRISHITAN !!
THE SON OF A BATEREN... WHEN THEY SEARCH HIM, THEY'LL FIND HIS KURUSU!

IF THEY FIND IT, THEY'LL NEVER FREE HIM.
THEY'LL TORTURE HIM FOR SURE...!
HHYUUUUUUUU

Hyuuuuuu KTAKKTAK
KTAK KTAK KTAKKTAK KTAK

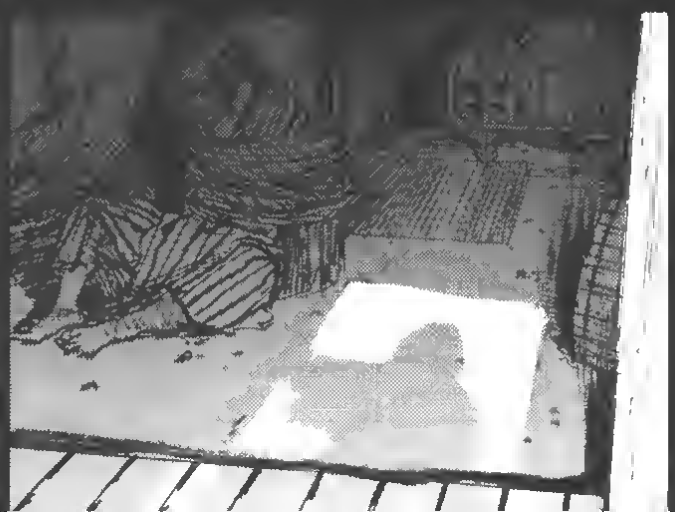
.....
.....
.....
ISAKU!!
CHANGE INTO THIS.
YOU'LL STAND OUT WHERE WE'RE GOING.
IS THIS A JANTA SPEAR?
LET'S TAKE IT!

KU... KUI-CHIRU.
IS *THIS* YOUR... *"JOUR-NEY"*...?
NOT *KUICHIRU! TOWA!*
WE WON'T DO IT AGAIN.
I'M JUST TAKING IT BACK FOR THE *UTARI.*
BUT THESE *BASHO UKEOININ* TRICK US. THEY'VE STOLEN *ALL KINDS* OF THINGS FROM US.
BUT YOU'RE NOT *AINU*, KUICHIRU.
I *TOLD* YOU TO CALL ME *TOWA!*
NOW HURRY *UP!* THEY'LL FIND US!

LET'S CROSS THE *SEA!*
I WANT TO GO SOMEPLACE WHERE NOBODY KNOWS ME!

CHING...
THAIR THEY GO!
THET WAY!
TOWA! STUPID!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
STEALING WAS BAD ENOUGH! BUT KILL-ING?!
MAYBE YOU HAD TO BEFORE... BUT TODAY ?!
BUT, BUT...
...I WAS SO HUNGRY. COULDN'T BEAR IT.
THAT JERKY, JUST HANG-ING THERE.
AND WHEN I REACHED, HE POINTED A GUN AT ME...

I...
I WAS
SO, SO
HUNGRY...
I COULDN'T
THINK
STRAIGHT.
IT ALL WENT
BLACK...
.....
.....
.....



I KILLED FOUR MEN...
.....
.....
.....
THERE WASN'T A CHOICE.
SHISAMU WON'T SHARE WITH STRANGERS.
AND IF WE STEAL...
...THEY DO THIS.
THERE WASN'T ALWAYS FOOD IN THE KOTAN.
BUT IF YOU RESPECTED THE WAY. THE GODS OF THE HILLS AND RIVERS GAVE FREELY.
HERE, THINGS... EVERY-THING...
...BE-LONGS TO SOMEBODY. TO HUMANS.
I NEVER DREAM-ED...
WE HAVE TO STEAL.
IF WE DON'T STEAL, WE DIE.

J...
...JUST... A CHILD...!

THUD!

IF YOU *GAVE* US THE CASH I WOULDN'T HAVE HURT YOU...

I KILLED FOUR MEN...
.....
.....
.....
THERE WASN'T A CHOICE.
SHISAMU WON'T SHARE WITH STRANGERS.
AND IF WE STEAL...
...THEY DO THIS.
THERE WASN'T ALWAYS FOOD IN THE KOTAN.
BUT IF YOU RESPECTED THE WAY. THE GODS OF THE HILLS AND RIVERS GAVE FREELY.
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...BE-LONGS TO SOMEBODY. TO HUMANS.
I NEVER DREAM-ED...
WE HAVE TO STEAL.
IF WE DON'T STEAL, WE DIE.

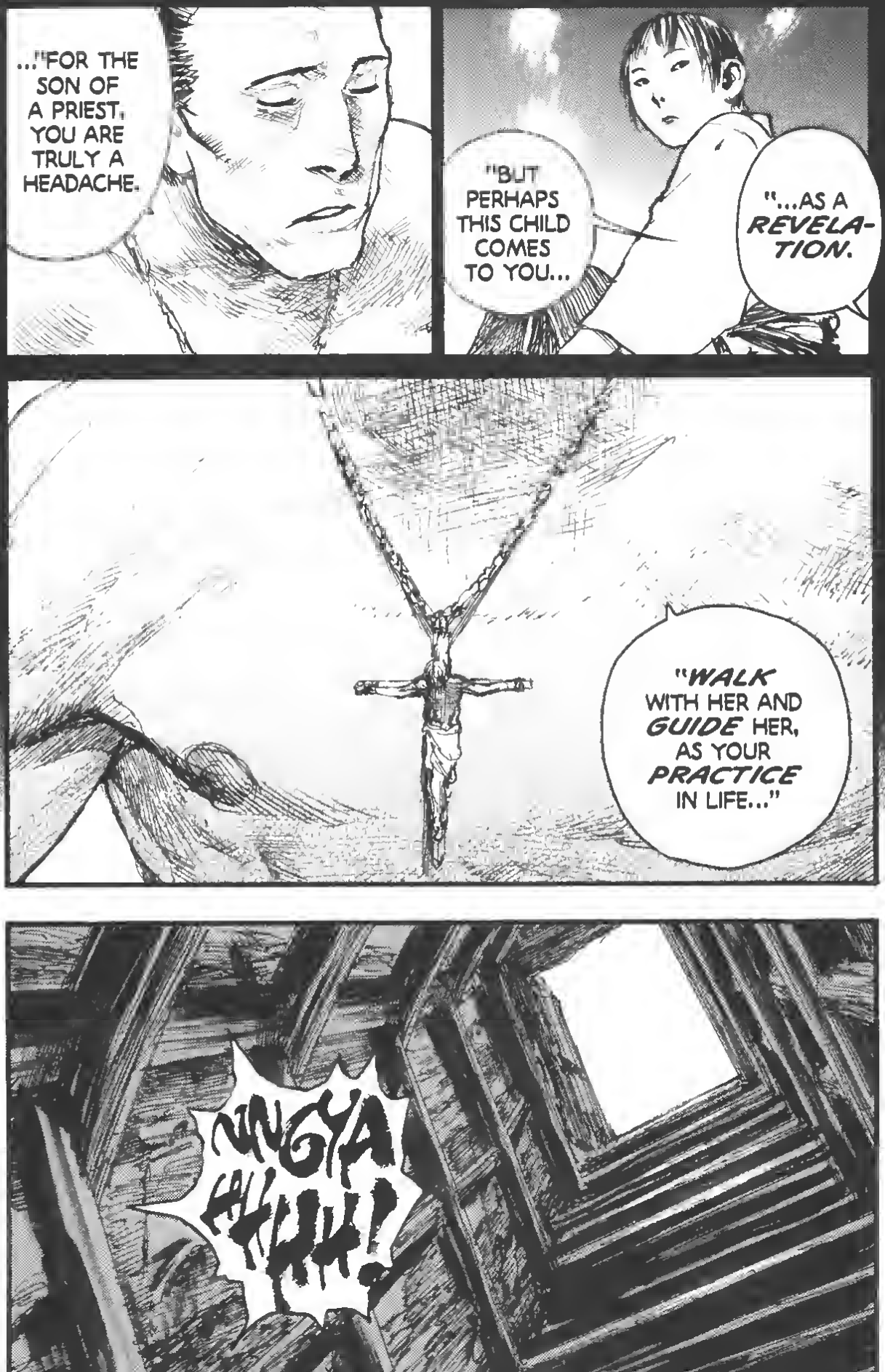
J...
...JUST... A CHILD...!

THUD!

IF YOU *GAVE* US THE CASH I WOULDN'T HAVE HURT YOU...

TOWA.
HM?
IF... IF WE GO WAY SOUTH...
...THERE HAVE TO BE MOUNTAINS THAT NO ONE OWNS.
LET'S BUILD A HOUSE IN THE FOOTHILLS.
PLANT POTATOS AND LIVE THERE.
MM...
MM... POTATOES.
SOUNDS... INTEREST-ING.

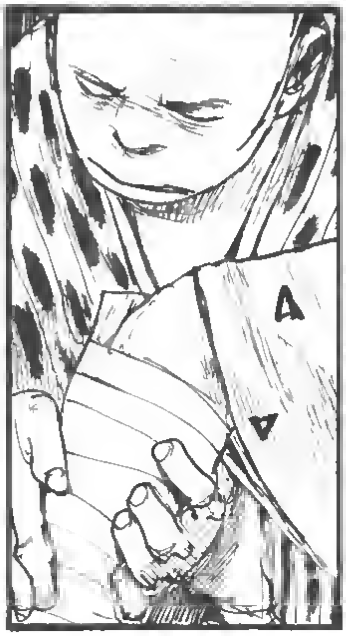
ISAKU.
DON'T ABANDON ME...
BEFORE WE LEFT...
...MY FATHER TOLD ME...
I... I'D NEVER!
DON'T DISAPPEAR.


..."FOR THE SON OF A PRIEST, YOU ARE TRULY A HEADACHE.
"BUT PERHAPS THIS CHILD COMES TO YOU...
"...AS A REVELATION.
"WALK WITH HER AND GUIDE HER, AS YOUR PRACTICE IN LIFE..."
NNGYA HHHH!

OWWCH! GAWWD!!
IT HURTS, YOU DAMN QUACK!
IT FRIGGIN' HURRRTS!!
IT'S ALL RIGHT. ALL FINE...!
THEY SAID YOU WERE A SUTURING MASTER...
UP-- UP TO SEVEN STITCHES, YES...
GOOAAORR...
.....
.....

HAH HAH
IT HURTS! AHNNG!
GOOD... WE'LL TAKE HIM FROM HERE.
BETTER?
AGAIN IN THREE DAYS. PREPARE!

HNNG!

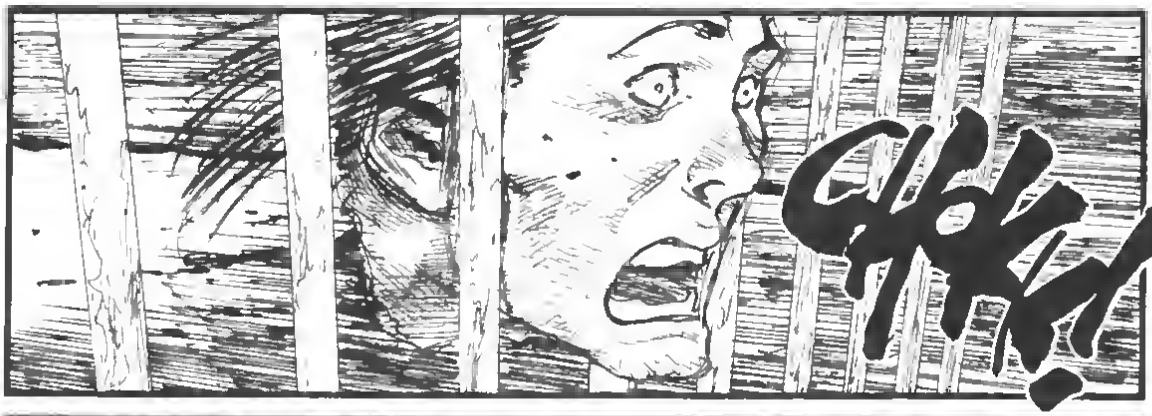


...!

D-DOCTOR!
IT'S ON... BACK-WARDS!

WHAT ?!
OH, DEAR. HOW TRUE.
WHADDAYA MEAN, "HOW TRUE" ?!
S- SIR...!
YOU DODDER-ING FOOL!! REATTACH IT!
BUT SIR...!
IF WE TAKE ANY LONGER, MANJI'S ARM MIGHT--
HRRRUNGG !!
ENOUGH! CANCEL-LED!
RESTORE THEIR ARMS!
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!
AIIEE!!! RIGHT NOW?! THAT'S...

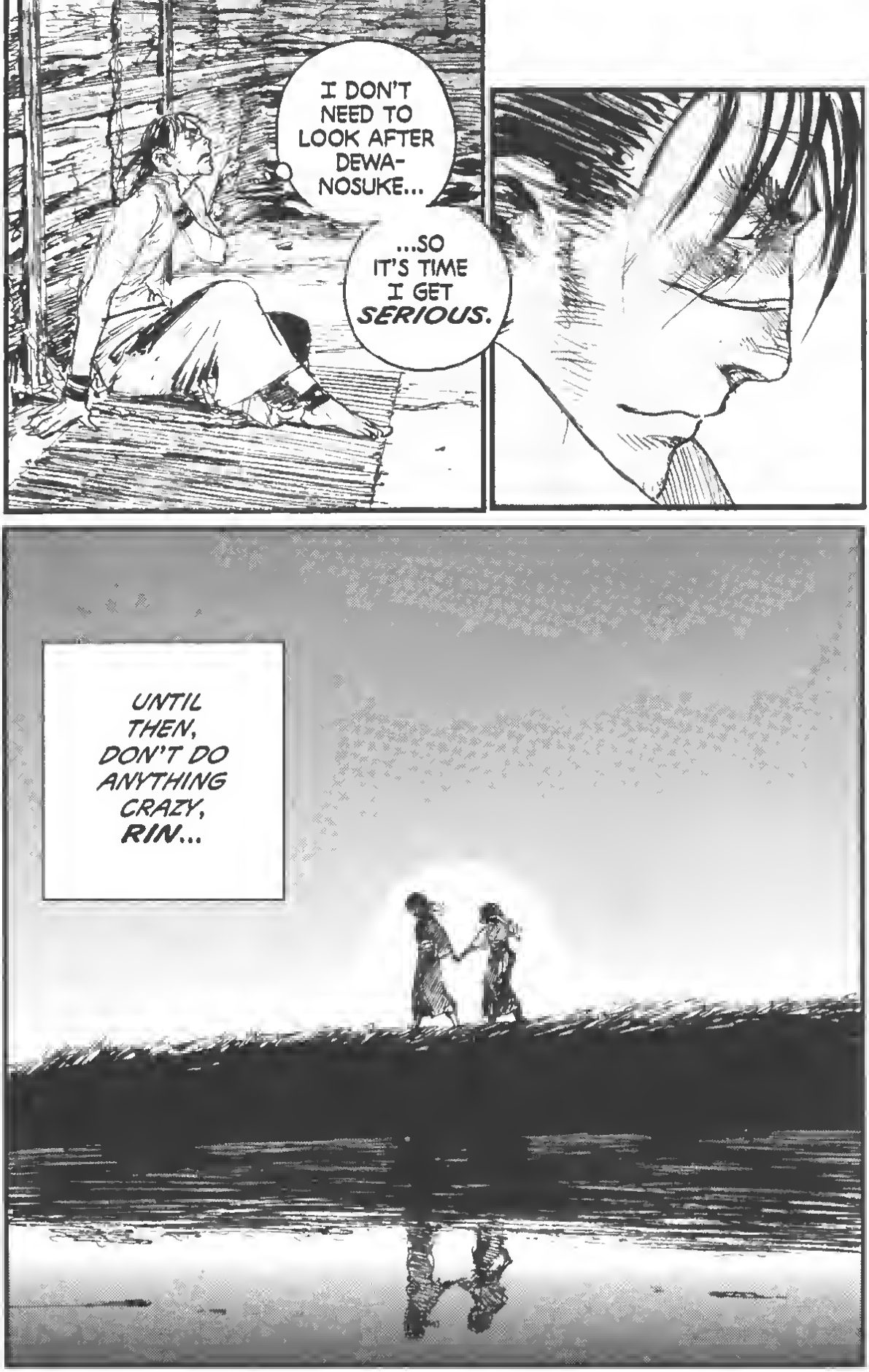
.....
.....
.....
GWAUH...
GYAHH!
WHAT ABOUT MY ARM?!
FINE, FINE. IT'LL STICK SOON.
RIGHT? TORA-EMON?
THIS IS GONNA STICK?!
P-PARDON?! UH, ACTUAL-LY--
YOU IDIOT!!
DO SOME-THING!!
BUT, BUT SIR--


GUGA!!

.....
.....
.....

HEEEK!
HIS HEAD! GET HIS HEAD!
YOUNG HABAKI!
THIS WHOLE SCENE HAS BECOME...
... A FARCE!
PEOPLE CALL ME KUBIKIRI ASA...
...BUT I NEVER TREAT A CRIMINAL'S BODY LIKE DIRT. THE SIGHT OF IT DOES NOT PLEASE ME.
SO I'M TAKING THE LIVER.

UHFF!
THEY SCREW UP UNTIL THEY QUIT...
...OR BY SOME FREAK CHANCE IT *WORKS.*
ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, THOUGHT I'D *WALK.*
BUT THAT'S IT... NO MORE OF *THIS.*



TO BE CONTINUED...!

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10956 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222

www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com • phillips@darkhorse.com

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Manji by Nick Katzfey, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Manji by Patrick Buendia, Toronto, Canada.

YOU'RE A WONDERFUL DESIGNER, DEBRA BAILEY!

Before we jump into our latest batch of letters, we'd like to acknowledge the work of Debra Bailey, *Blade of the Immortal*'s designer for just over five years, working on issues 58 (July 2001) to 116 (August 2006). Deb's moving on to another position here at Dark Horse Comics, but she's been Manji's designer for the longest period so far, working on this monthly series as well as our collected editions. We'll miss having you on the "Samura Squad," Deb, but we'll still be seeing you around the offices. THANK YOU for your years of hard work and creativity! (We'll visit with our new *Blade of the Immortal* designer, Scott Cook, next month. He looks like Magatsu's skinnier younger brother, ladies!) Now for your letters . . .

Blade Letters,
This is truly a dramatic manga story. I have read some manga books before, but this is the first time I picked up a manga comic book. The operations mentioned in this story sound so diabolical and evil. Will immortality take precedence over mortality, when the limbs set in? I am intrigued and will be seeing how this story unfolds! I can see how I can get hooked with all of its action, intrigue, mystery, suspense, and thrills. I got goose bumps on my arms after reading Hiroaki Samura's *Blade of the Immortal* #114. Seeing Dewanosuke facing that samurai sword and then seeing what happens to him afterwards made me quiver. The artwork is black and white, but I was surprised at how graphic it is. The characters are drawn with marvelous realism. I must say, this is quite a comic book. I still don't know what to make out of it. It's quite dramatic and scary, but I enjoyed it nevertheless.

Sincerely yours,
Kendra Larry A.K.A. Kendra the Jungle Girl
Sacramento, California

Thanks for writing in, Jungle Girl. Stick around—it just gets better. *Scarier*. Hopefully your experience with *Blade of the Immortal* will lead you to check out other black-and-white comics, too, like *Usagi Yojimbo* (which hits its 100th issue this month!). If you like Hiroaki Samura's art style, you should also find *Ohikkoshi*, Samura-dono's first collection of modern-era short stories. On sale now! Not as gory as this book, but relationships and romances can still be pretty frightening at times.

Dear *Blade*,
It seems like Hiroaki Samura never runs out of ideas. I mean, he's skilled in the art of storytelling and knowledge of the human anatomy, but I don't think he's getting enough credit for the creativity that he brings to the book. *Blade of the Immortal* is always one of the better books in the market, so thank you for publishing it here in North America. I hope you guys like my fan art. I had some good times sketching that.

Patrick Buendia
Toronto, Canada

Thank YOU, Patrick and Nick, for sending in some great pieces. Longtime Dark Horse Comics readers may remember Nick—he won our last *Super Manga Blast!* fan art contest way back in January 2006. Keep the good work coming, fellas!

Dear fellow *BOTI* viewers,

Jhomar Soriano's switching to a lighter line style in issue 115's "Rumble to Kaga" was to good effect in a smart merging of story elements. It's so enjoyable that he's coming up with these new pages. Pay him 100 bushels of rice per month for a regular monthly gig. Philip! And then what about Hipp's back cover take on Manji? I think he accurately caught the N.H.S. (Natural Huggable Sweetness) of our man. Does everyone else think, as I do, that this Samura guy is an artist to watch? Yep, thought so. Cheers everyone! Chilled pony-bottles of saki-lite for the house! No—I swear it's better than the hi-cal.

Also, does the prison arc get into the exchanging of animal and human body parts? You know, it's a crazy grapevine out here, especially after having seen *Pirates of the Carribean 2*.

Jamie Umstattd
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Jamie, you're one of my favorite *Blade* correspondents. You deserve a *kessen-chu* prize! (Got worms?) Keep it kooky—and write again soon. Our favorite parody artist, Mr. Jhomar Soriano, will be showing up again in a few months with another comic strip offering. What did you think of his new parody arc, "On the Evils Under Edo," which debuted last issue? Cool cat Oan Hipp (who draws *The Amazing Joy Buzzards*) will be contributing a color pinup for next issue's back cover, so you'll get another Hipp fix in thirty days!

Back cover illustration by John O'Neill from Santurce, Puerto Rico. Mr. O'Neill says, "I'm so sorry that Dewanosuke had to die! Oh, well . . . Manji will make 'em pay, right? He'd better. I already hate those bastards! In the meantime, here is a drawing dedicated to Dewanosuke's memory." We miss Dewa, too! Thanks for sending in this creepy piece of "found art," John!

–Philip Simon

NEXT MONTH

Separated from Isaku and Manji, Dōa and Rin begin to lean on each other for support, with neither of them knowing that they're actually on opposing sides of a complex, generations-long conflict. As Edo's most esteemed doctors mull over Kagimura's experiments and Manji's mystical, regenerative bloodworms, Rin starts spying on Edo Castle and Kagimura's comings and goings. She just needs one big clue to get her rescue operation rolling. The Edo Castle stakeout commences with "Barefoot," part one of five!

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

—Dōa uses the Edo Period pronunciations of "Christian" and "crucifix" in this issue. These are different from contemporary Japanese pronunciations, so Samura is deliberately evoking a period feel by using "Kirishitan" and "kurusu."

—After watching missionaries lay the groundwork for the colonization of the Philippines and other neighboring corners of Asia, Tokugawa Ieyasu formerly banned Christianity in 1614, deporting missionaries and killing Christians who refused to renounce their faith. Revolts by Christian believers were brutally suppressed, and surviving believers went underground, concealing crucifixes and other signs of their faith from the authorities. In a remote corner of distant Hokkaidō, Isaku's father appears to have escaped the brutal repression.

—Asaemon uses Kagimura's first name and says, "young Habaki," clearly indicating his higher status in Edo society than Kagimura, based on age and, very likely, trust in the eyes of the shogunate. Kagimura takes this condescending tone in stride.

GLOSSARY

Ainu: Natives of the Japanese archipelago were driven north by today's modern Japanese population, now found only on the northern island of Hokkaidō.

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshu. Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Basho Ukeoinin: Under the Tokugawa, Hokkaidō was nominally managed by the feudal fiefdom of Matsumae Han. *Basho Ukeoinin* were traders licensed to deal with the *Ainu* on the Han's behalf.

Bateren. A corruption of the word "padre," for the Portuguese priests that first arrived in Japan in the sixteenth century.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of a higher rank.

Edo. Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Han. A feudal domain.

Ittō-ryū. The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Janta: The *Ainu* were part of the Okhotsk culture zone of aboriginal peoples living around the southern half of the Sea of Okhotsk, with similar languages and material culture. Living on what is today Russian Sakhalin as well as on Hokkaidō, the *Ainu* traded with aboriginal peoples in the delta of the mighty Amur River emptying into the Sea of Okhotsk, today part of the borderline between China and Russia. Dōa identifies the "Janta spear" as belonging to one of these Amur tribes.

Found *Ohikkoshi* yet? If you're a fan of Hiroaki Samura and his *Blade of the Immortal* epic, you'll be delighted and disturbed by his shorter-form, modern-era romantic comedies! You can find or order *Ohikkoshi*, his wonderful, 248-page collection at any comic book store NOW! (ISBN numbers: 1-59307-622-3 and 978-1-59307-622-1!!) Samura's main offering, "Ohikkoshi," is a hilarious, non-stop-barrage look at the lives of several university students as they fall in lust, make fun of their friends, ride motorbikes, get involved in strange contests, and try to avoid making life-changing decisions while drunk. You will NOT BELIEVE the amount of energy that Samura-dono's infused onto each page! A very different reading experience. "Luncheon of Tears Diary (Vagabond Shoujo Manga-ka)" is another hectic storytelling romp, as we follow Natsumi Funabashi (budding manga creator) through her years of luck, love, tragedy, torment, more luck and love, and then . . . well . . . something close to hope. But it has funny moments, too—we promise! Oh, and you won't want to miss Samura's autobiographical piece, "Kyoto Super Barhopping Journal (Bloodbath at Mi-dorogaike)," which kind of speaks for itself.

"I think indie comics aficionados would find a lot to like in Ohikkoshi. *I know I did. In fact, I'd go so far to say fans of Bryan Lee O'Malley's* Scott Pilgrim *books would find themselves on very familiar footing with the title story. . . In all honesty, the lead story alone is worth the price of admission."*

—David Welsh
Comic World News

"Samura's art style here is a bit different than his style in Blade, *but only because he tends to keep things tighter. . . Panel-to-panel storytelling is superb. . . A fun take on romance that goes for the heart without being sickly-sweet, Samura has produced something here that is very rare—a romance comic men will enjoy."*

—Dan Grendell
Ain't It Cool News

"The book offers a compelling case for Samura's skills. If the samurai genre is his comfort zone, then this is about as far from his comfort zone as he can get, and the work is just as strong."

—J. Caleb Mozzocco
Las Vegas Weekly

Find or order *Ohikkoshi*, Hiroaki Samura's wonderful, 248-page collection at any comic book store NOW!

GLOSSARY
(continued)

Kessen chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Kirishitan: a Christian

Kotun: Ainu word for village or homeland

Kuichiru: Dōa has used several different names throughout her life, including Kuichiru and Towa.

Kurusu: a Christian crucifix

Mugai-ryū: A group of criminals who worked as assassins for the shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets. Disbanded by Habaki Kagimura.

Muteniichi-ryu: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ryū: A sword school.

Shisamu: Ainu word for the Japanese

Utari: Ainu word for friends and comrades that is sometimes used to mean all Ainu.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from su — "well" + asti — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the manji in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

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MAN INFECTED WITH KISSEN CHU IN JAPAN, 1860 HAND TINTED ALBUMEN PRINT, 6 1/4 x 8 1/2

KRYPTONIA

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